

Calving and Scours

This week I follow up with additional calving information provided by Extension Beef Specialists Sandy Johnson and Dr. AJ Tarpoff. You should develop standard operation procedures for calving and providing assistance. Include list and contact information for individuals who can provide more expertise or assistance as required. The following are suggestions on when to intervene.

If you suspect the cow has been in Stage 1 over 8 hours. Stage 1 characteristics; restlessness, pain, lie down and get up frequently, seek isolation (signs more apparent in first-calf heifers than mature cows).

Stage 2 –

- Water sack visible for 2 hours and cow is not trying
- Cow trying for over 30 minutes and no progress is being made
- Cow has quit trying for over 15-20 minutes after a period of progress
- Cow or calf showing excessive fatigue or stress (swollen tongue or excessive bleeding)
- You can observe the calf presentation is other than two front feet and head first.

When Calving Starts

- Calves should have colostrum within first 2 hours of life, if calf can't get colostrum from dam, take steps to give colostrum within 4-6 hrs of birth.
- Colostrum intake should be 10% of calf's body weight, 0.5 – 1 gallon. First choice is for calf to nurse a bottle so that colostrum goes directly to the abomasum. Don't over feed to encourage calf to nurse on its own, 1.5-quart dose good starting point.
- Handle healthy calves before sick calves and avoid exposing newborns to contaminants on clothing or materials used on sick calves.
- If a cow is brought in for any amount of calving assistance, make sure she leaves with a clean udder.

Work towards developing a notebook that has all the standard operating procedures for your operation. Include things like yearly vaccination plans, treatment protocols, calving and calving assistance protocols, euthanasia protocols, drought management plans and weather emergency plans. This will be a valuable resource when communicating with employees new and old, when reviewing what needs to be improved for the next year or if a health emergency forces someone else to take care of the herd.

It's also important to be vigilant about calf scours. Dr. Tarpoff notes: Neonatal calf scours (diarrhea) is a multifactorial issue. The risk and occurrence can change year to year based on many different factors. Typically, early spring calving due to the cold, wet and windy weather, creates some unique challenges in combating calf scours for cattle producers.

Causes - Scours can be initiated by infectious agents such as viruses, bacteria, and even protozoan parasites. It is important to note that most of the pathogens of concern are shed at low levels through the feces by healthy members of the resident cowherd. Most of the disease and death loss related to scours occurs within the first month of age. The bacteria, E. coli, is a common culprit within the first 5 days of life. Rota virus, Corona virus, and cryptosporidium (protozoa) are commonly identified in cases between 1 week and 3 weeks of age. Mixed infectious with more than 1 pathogen commonly occurs as well. Salmonella and Clostridial infections can also occur with minimal clinical signs before acute death.

Nutritional causes of neonatal diarrhea can also occur. "Milk Scours", as it is often referred to, is a non-infectious cause of white loose manure. This tends to occur after a cow/calf separation event. The hungry calves tend to over eat leading to undigested milk passing through the digestive tract. The intestinal disruption is often self-limiting and clears up within a day or two without treatment.

Clinical Signs - The most common clinical signs of calf scours are watery stool, lethargy, and dehydration.

- Diarrhea: The color of the stool can be brown, green, yellow, or grey in color. Tail and the rear legs may be covered in wet manure. Bloody stools can also be seen with Salmonella, Clostridial, or coccidiosis.
- Lethargy: noted by decreased desire to nurse, depressed attitude, and reluctance to stand. Staggered walk may also occur.
- Dehydration: identified by having sunken eyes. Another effective means to measure dehydration is by tenting the skin of the calf. A well hydrated calf's skin will snap back flat after pinching it. if it takes 1-3 seconds, the calf would be ~6-8% dehydrated. If the skin tent takes up to 5 seconds, the calf would be ~8-10% dehydrated. The severe loss of fluids also interrupts the calf's acid/base and electrolyte balances.

You are encouraged to visit with your local veterinarian for treatment options.